



Chapter 1

**California's
Urgent
Challenge**



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TUDENT performance results and schools' effectiveness in teaching are being scrutinized and compared locally and across California. Schools are seeking ways to increase student achievement scores and gain the confidence of the school community. Besides reaching for the goal of improved test scores, schools must accept the challenge that comes with California's growing population and increased diversity. Although these societal changes provide ever-expanding opportunities, they may also be accompanied by intolerance and behaviors that demonstrate bias, hate, and cruelty toward others who are perceived as being different.

Effective schools are safe schools. Therefore, school communities appreciate the need to prevent incidents or events that threaten safety, and they need tools to respond effectively to such incidents. To achieve schools' mission to educate students and maintain campus safety, schools must be able to recognize and prevent bullying and cruelty and be prepared to respond to acts of bullying when they occur.

Bullying at School is dedicated to helping schools understand the urgent challenges that threaten students' and staff members' safety and provides schools with the tools for addressing these events. The California State Constitution affirms that students and staff have the right to attend safe schools.¹ Therefore, schools have the moral obligation to ensure that every student experiences a sense of belonging, respect, dignity, and safety and that every teacher has the opportunity to teach.

This school-based resource guide is designed to promote discussion, planning, immediate action, and the development of effective long-term responses to hate-motivated behavior and bullying.

¹ Article I, § 28(c), of the California State Constitution, approved by voters in 1982, states that all students and staff of public primary, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses that are safe, secure, and peaceful.

The enduring message must be that for schools to be effective, they must be safe—free of intimidation, bias, and hate.



The Impetus for Addressing Violent Behaviors Among Youths

THE act of bullying and the harm it causes have typically been given little consideration; bullying is believed to be a natural and unfortunate part of growing up. The prevalence of bullying has come under scrutiny more recently because of the major role of bullying as a precursor to the notorious and avoidable incidents of school violence across the nation. It is now known that bullying behavior is common among children and that the harmful and lasting effects on children deserve special attention. Today, the link between bullying and later delinquent and criminal behavior can no longer be ignored.

A study published in April 2001 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* noted that almost 30 percent of the 15,686 public school students surveyed reported occasional to frequent involvement in bullying, either as a bully, a target, or both.² If students are in fear for their own safety, they are unable to concentrate on learning. However, bullying behavior does not lend itself to the same interventions that may be effective in other types of conflict. Both the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence find that the most effective model is a comprehensive program using a combination of interventions—schoolwide, at the classroom level, and at the individual level—to create a social environment characterized by:

- Positive adult involvement;
- Firm limits for unacceptable behavior;
- Consistent use of sanctions for rule violations; and
- Recognition that adults are the authority.³

Although studies of bullying behavior and antibullying programs have only recently begun in the United States, data from other countries suggest that a comprehensive approach to reducing bullying at school can change student behaviors and attitudes and can increase teachers' willingness to intervene.

² Tonja R. Nansel, et al., "Bullying Behaviors Among U.S. Youth: Prevalence and Association with Psychosocial Adjustment," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 285, No. 16 (April 25, 2001) <<http://jama.ama-assn.org/>>. Click on "Past Issues."

³ "Bullying Prevention in the School; Research-Based Strategies for Educators," *The Challenge*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Spring 2003) <<http://www.thechallenge.org/past.htm>>.



The Legal Authority for Addressing Bullying and Hateful Behavior at School

TODAY, bullying behaviors at school are recognized as dangerous and harmful acts that victimize the targeted student and bystanders. Bullying can no longer be dismissed as harmless teasing or as a normal yet undesirable behavior. Rather, bullying is a pattern of deliberate, negative, hurtful, aggressive acts that works to shift the balance of physical, emotional, or social power.

Behavior motivated by bias or hate is similar to bullying and is intended to cause emotional suffering, physical injury, or property damage through intimidation, harassment, bigoted slurs or epithets, force or threat of force, or vandalism. Hateful or biased behavior is motivated in part or in whole by hostility toward a person's real or perceived race, nationality, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. (*Education Code* sections 200, 220, 233, and 48900.3 describe policies and intent specific to hate-motivated violence. *Penal Code* sections 422.6, 422.7, 422.75, 422.8, 422.9, 422.95, and 628 define what constitutes hate-motivated crimes.)

The responsibility to establish the school environment lies with the entire school community. The environment evolves from the ideals, policies, practices, and administration of the school. *Education Code* Section 35294 et seq. requires each school to develop and implement a School Safety Plan as a part of its overall local education plan and to revisit the plan annually and amend it as needed. The first step in the planning process, as described in *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action*, is to gather a planning committee that actively involves school administrators, teachers, students, and parents.⁴ Community service and civic organizations also have important roles as providers and resources to the school.

⁴ *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2002, p. 51 <<http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/safety/>>.